

FTR

From: llee@nfbct.org
Sent: Wednesday, February 17, 2016 4:51 PM
To: INSTestimony
Subject: Testimony for SB35, public hearing on 2/18/2016

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RE: Senate Bill 35: An Act Requiring Health Insurance Coverage for the Purchase of Assistance Dogs

Dear Members of the Insurance & Real Estate Committee,

I urge you to oppose Senate Bill 35 as written. I think that any words referencing guide dogs for blind people should be removed from SB35. The process in which a blind person obtains a guide dog does not include paying any money to the school; the costs are deferred by donations to the training facilities. Some guide dog users will choose to give a donation to the perspective school but it is his or her choice.

A service animal is a different scenario all together. The person receiving the service animal must come up with a substantial amount of money out of his or her pocket. This is where the insurance would come into play to help these people with the cost of the service animal.

If the word guide dog appears in this bill, it could potentially change the structure of how the guide dog schools are funded and could hurt them financially. If philanthropists know that these organizations are being funded by insurance companies, why would they give their money to them instead of another nonprofit?

The process that we go through to get our dogs is:

- 1 we put in our application
- 2 the school sends a representative to interview us
- 3 the school review board evaluates each applicant
- 4 we go to the school for a two to four week period to train with our new dog

When we receive our guide dog, he or she is approximately two years old. It has already been through some extensive training. It has spent about a year and a half with a puppy raiser who teaches it all the basics and takes it everywhere that they go, such as grocery store, the bank, social events and out to different restaurants, just to name a few. After this, the dog returns to the school for a five month formal guide dog training. We then go to the school and receive training with that dog for a two to four week training period. At that point, we go home and train with our guide dog to go to the places that we frequent. No part of this process includes the blind guide dog handler paying anything.

I think this bill is a fantastic thing for users of service animals but please remove the references to guide dog for blind people from it.

Thank you for your consideration,
Robert Palaski